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## **Michele Bachmann: Here's why we must resist SCHIP expansion**

**Michele Bachmann**

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Congress is engaged in a debate about the future of health care in America and about what should have been a proposal to extend affordable coverage for low-income children.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP, is set to expire soon. This decade-old program offers states federal funding to provide health insurance for children in households that do not qualify for Medicaid but cannot afford private coverage.

Unfortunately, the program has become politicized, and Congress recently passed legislation to expand SCHIP coverage beyond children, beyond U.S. citizens and beyond those who are truly in need, and, contrary to the Star Tribune's editorial (Oct. 5), that is where the problem lies.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, several million SCHIP-eligible children are uninsured. Surely, children in need should have the health insurance promised to them before SCHIP is expanded further up the income ladder or before more of the program's limited resources are used for adults.

Here's my idea: Let's cover the kids first. Let's focus on children in need who don't have access to health insurance and fund SCHIP as it was meant to be. I've publicly supported legislation that would accomplish these goals and keep SCHIP moving forward to help those it was intended to help.

But some want to move SCHIP in the wrong direction. Under the bill passed by Congress and vetoed by the president, SCHIP dollars could be used to cover childless adults and more-affluent families -- in some cases, households earning up to \$83,000 per year. It also changes current law to make it easier for illegal immigrants to get SCHIP funds.

A Congressional Budget Office study shows that more than 77 percent of children affected by this expansion already have personal, private health insurance. So why create an incentive that pushes kids out of private insurance into a government-run program, rather than focusing on low-income, uninsured children?

Worse, this legislation makes SCHIP financially unstable. In order to appear fiscally sound, it gives children health insurance for five years, then cuts SCHIP funding by nearly 80 percent -- a classic bait and switch that will cause millions of American children to lose their health coverage.

And what are the taxpayers getting in return? According to the CBO, the bill will lead to only 800,000 eligible-but-unenrolled children being enrolled in SCHIP by 2012. The sad fact is that it would be cheaper to give each of these kids \$72,000 than it would be to enact this bill, and it would probably show healthier results.

Rather than playing politics with children's health or scoring points with radio and TV ads, Congress can show the American people that we are here to solve problems. I hope that House leaders will do the right thing and bring up a bill we can all support.

Michele Bachmann, R-Minn., serves in the U.S. House of Representatives.

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